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News Release

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N.B. Human Rights Commission

International Women's Day statement (06/03/06)

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FREDERICTON (CNB) - In recognition of International Women's Day, March 8, the following message is issued by Gordon L. Porter, chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission.

"March 8 is International Women's Day. The Canadian theme for this year, Beyond Laws: the Right to be Me, reminds us of the gap that sometimes exists between our laws and the reality of women's lives in all their diversity.

"In New Brunswick, the Human Rights Act was amended in 1971 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and in 1973 on the basis of marital status. Before then it was legal for women to be excluded from jobs because they were women, and to lose their jobs if they married. Sexual harassment was first challenged under the Human Rights Act in the early 1980s. In 1992, the act was amended to prohibit pregnancy discrimination as a form of sex discrimination.

"Obviously, these legal developments were important breakthroughs that significantly improved the opportunities available to women.

"However, despite several other laws and government programs, there remain important real-life issues that continue to have a disproportionate impact on women.

"Issues that affect New Brunswick women affect all New Brunswickers, and raise concerns not just of fairness and justice, but also of prosperity and economic development. There are substantial personal and business costs, as well as costs to society as a whole, when women are sexually harassed or discriminated against - for example, not promoted into upper management. There are economic benefits to laws and programs that promote sexual equality.

"As New Brunswick works to attract more immigrants, one of our assets is the protection of our human rights, which include those that continue to promote equality for women.

"As we observe International Women's Day this year, I invite all New Brunswickers to celebrate the progress that has been made, and to consider the further steps necessary to bring about full equality for women."

06/03/06

EDITOR'S NOTE: Human Rights Commission's website: http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/index.htm.

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